Public Hearing Report

Public hearing 5
How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected people with disability?

Easy Read version

Sydney
18 – 21 August 2020
How to use this report

The Disability Royal Commission (the Royal Commission) wrote this report.

When you see the word ‘we’, it means the Royal Commission.

We wrote this report in an easy to read way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

We have written some words in **bold**.

This means the letters are thicker and darker.

We explain what these words mean.

There is a list of these words on page 46.
This Easy Read report is a summary of another report.

A summary only includes the most important ideas.

You can find the other report on our website.

You can ask for help to read this report. A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

This is a long document.

You don’t have to read it all at once.
**What is in this report?**

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This report is about **Public hearing 5.**

A hearing is a **formal**, public meeting.

When something is public:

- anyone can watch
- we share the records of what happened so anyone can read them.

When something is formal, there are strict rules about how it should be done.

We hold hearings as part of our work at the Royal Commission.
We had 4 public hearings before this one.

We held this one in Sydney.

Public hearing 5:

- started on 18 August 2020
- ended on 21 August 2020.

This report talks about what we:

- heard at Public hearing 5
- recommend.

When we recommend something, we say how to make things better.

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- thinks about what this report says
- acts quickly to fix the problems we heard about.
What was Public hearing 5 about?

Public hearing 5 was about **COVID-19**.

COVID-19 is also called coronavirus.

**COVID-19:**

- is an illness that can spread easily from one person to another person
- has affected many people around the world.

COVID-19 has been called a **pandemic** because it spread quickly to lots of countries around the world.
The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency.

A public health emergency is a time when:

- there is a risk to the health of everyone in the community
- everyone needs to act quickly to protect themselves
- governments need to do what they can to keep people safe.

Most people in Australia have not known a public health emergency like this before.
Public hearing 5 was about:

- how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people with disability
- how disability supports and supports have changed because of COVID-19
- if people with disability have been safe during the COVID-19 pandemic
- what the Australian Government has done for people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.
The COVID-19 pandemic and people with disability

The health of people with disability is much more at risk during a public health emergency.

This is because people with disability are at more risk of health issues than other people in our community.

Governments must do everything they can to keep people with disability safe.

We wrote a Statement of Concern about how COVID-19 affects people with disability.

Our Statement of Concern is a document about things we worry about.
Our Statement of Concern asked governments to make sure they keep people with disability safe during COVID-19.

Our Statement of Concern also asked governments to include people with disability when they:

- make plans
- take action.
People with disability told us they are very worried about:

- the COVID-19 pandemic

- not being included when the Australian Government:
  - makes plans
  - takes action.

During COVID-19, it’s important to keep a safe distance from other people.

We call this:

- physical distancing
- social distancing.

This helps to stop COVID-19 spreading.
Some people with disability rely on support workers for some of their daily personal care needs, such as:

- eating
- drinking
- getting dressed
- using the toilet.

This means they cannot stay away from other people.

This puts people more at risk of getting COVID-19.
Human rights

Human rights are rules about how everybody should be treated:

- fairly
- equally.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* is an agreement between different countries.

Some people call it the CRPD.

In this report we call it the UN Convention.

The UN Convention says people with disability should have the same **human rights** as everybody else.
The UN Convention talks about what countries can do to:

- keep people with disability safe
- make life better for people with disability.

We looked at:

- how this works for the COVID-19 pandemic
- what the Australian Government has done for people with disability during this time.
The UN Convention says governments must:

- make sure they talk to people with disability about things they do that might affect them
- support people with disability during emergencies.

The UN Convention also says people with disability:

- have the right to good health care
- must not face discrimination when they need health care.

Discrimination is when someone is treated badly because of something about them they can’t change.
At Public hearing 5, we heard that the Australian Government did not talk to people with disability:

- about what they need
- when the COVID-19 pandemic started.

This means the Australian Government’s policies did not:

- include people with disability
- meet the needs of people with disability.

Policies are:

- government plans for how to do things
- where rules come from.
People with disability had trouble getting things they needed, such as:

- supports and services

- food or medicine

- information

- personal protective equipment (PPE).

PPE includes things like:

- face masks
- face shields
- gloves.
What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should talk to people with disability about what they need:

- during the COVID-19 pandemic
- to stay safe during other future emergencies.

The Australian Government should also talk to disability organisations. They understand what people with disability need.

The Australian Government should provide

- **funding**
- support.

Funding is money from the government to pay for services.
The Australian Government should talk to people with disability and disability organisations when it makes:

- policies
- programs.

The Government should look for **gaps** in:

- policies
- programs.

A gap is an area where something is missing.

If people with disability are not included, they should fix those gaps.
The Advisory Committee

The Australian Government put a group of people together called an **Advisory Committee**.

The Advisory Committee tells the Australian Government what people with disability need.

The Advisory Committee includes people:

- with disability
- from disability organisations
- from **advocacy organisations**
- from the Australian Government.

Advocacy organisations are groups that speak up for people with disability. They can:

- help you have your say
- give you information and advice.
Setting up the Advisory Committee was a good thing.

What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should keep working with the Advisory Committee:

- during the COVID-19 pandemic
- in the future.
First Nations people with disability

First Nations people are also known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Australian Government put a group of people together called the First Nations Advisory Group.


But the First Nations Advisory Group does not:

- include First Nations people with disability
- have to talk about what First Nations people with disability need.

What do we recommend?

The First Nations Advisory Group should:

- include First Nations people with disability
- make sure it talks about what First Nations people with disability need.
Services for people with disability

In our community, there are services for:

- people with disability
- older people.

These services include places for people to live.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government gave clear information to services for older people about how to keep people safe.

But the Australian Government did not give clear information to disability services.
What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should give disability services clear information about:

- how to keep people with disability who use their services safe

- what to do if someone who uses their services gets COVID-19.
In Australia, different parts of the Australian Government look after different things. We call them departments.

The Department of Social Services looks after services for people with disability.

The Department of Health looks after health.

There is 1 area in the Department of Health that looks after the health of older people.

But there is no area in the Department of Health to look after the health of people with disability.
What do we recommend?

The Department of Health should have an area that looks after the health of people with disability.

This area of the Department of Health would:

- plan how to protect the health and wellbeing of people with disability
- plan how to keep people with disability safe during emergencies
- talk to the Advisory Committee
- work with the Advisory Committee.
Getting tested for COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic it has been hard for people with disability to get:

- tested for COVID-19
- clear information about COVID-19 testing.

This made many people with disability:

- worried
- upset.

In April 2020, the Australian Government shared a plan they developed.
This plan talks about:

- making it easier for people with disability to get tested for COVID-19
- giving people with disability clear information about COVID-19 testing.

Not everybody was following the plan when we held Public hearing 5.

What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should keep working on the things in their plan.
Advocacy

Advocacy is when someone speaks up for you.

An advocate is someone who can:

- support you
- help you have your say
- give you information and advice.

People with disability can speak up for themselves.
This is called self-advocacy.

Advocacy is important in an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic.
During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has not been enough funding for:

- advocates
- advocacy organisations.

**What do we recommend?**

The Australian Government should provide more funding for:

- advocacy
- advocacy organisations.

The Australian Government should provide more funding during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Government should put some money aside for funding advocacy during emergencies.
When we talk about **data**, we mean:

- facts
- information
- records.

In Australia, we do not have good data about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people with disability.

This makes it hard to know how many:

- people with disability have COVID-19
- disability support workers have COVID-19.

This also makes it hard to know if plans to stop COVID-19 in disability services are working.

The UN Convention says the Australian Government should collect and keep good data about people with disability.
What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should:

- follow what the UN Convention says
- collect and keep good data about people with disability in Australia
- share data about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people with disability.
The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a way to support people with disability.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) makes sure people with disability who take part in the NDIS:

- are safe
- get good services.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, the NDIS Commission gave disability service providers information about how to keep people with disability safe.
But service providers should have already had:

- information before the COVID-19 pandemic started
- plans in place.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDIS Commission should have given service providers better information about:

- how to keep people with disability safe
- changing how people with disability use their services
- stopping their services.
What do we recommend?

The NDIS Commission should make sure service providers have good information about what to do during emergencies.

The NDIS Commission should have policies and plans for keeping people with disability safe during emergencies.

People with disability who use the NDIS should be able to change their NDIS plans quickly during emergencies.
The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) runs the NDIS.

In April 2020, the NDIA made phone calls to NDIS participants with a higher risk of health problems from COVID-19.

NDIS participants are people with disability who:

- take part in the NDIS
- have NDIS plans
- have NDIS funding.
The NDIA tried to find out if these NDIS participants:

- were using their NDIS plans

- needed more funding or support for their NDIS plans.

The calls did not help these NDIS participants get PPE.

Some people thought the NDIA should have asked if NDIS participants needed more help during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Some people said:

- NDIS plans needed to change more quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic

- the NDIA should change the rules so family members can be paid to provide support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We did not get enough information to recommend anything about the NDIA in this hearing.

We will look at the NDIA again in future hearings.
Disability support workers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many disability support workers did not get:

- the PPE they needed
- information or training about how to stay safe
- information or training about how to work safely.

It was not easy for disability support workers to get tested for COVID-19.

Some disability support workers work with many people with disability.
Some disability support workers also work with older people.

COVID-19 spreads quickly from 1 person to another.

This means many people with disability were put at risk.

**What do we recommend?**

The Australian Government should make sure disability support workers can get:

- the PPE they need
- tested for COVID-19 easily.

State and Territory governments around Australia should help with this too.
Using health care services

People with disability have the right to get good health care when they need it.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people with disability worried about:

- getting the health care they need
- discrimination.
What do we recommend?

The Australian Government should make sure people with disability can get health care they need during emergencies.

In Australia, we have laws against discrimination.

The Australian Government should talk to the Advisory Committee about:

- giving people with disability health care during emergencies
- keeping people with disability safe from COVID-19 in the future.
Closing comments

Public hearing 5 was about:

- how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people with disability
- what the Australian Government has done for people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, the Australian Government could have done more for people with disability.

The Australian Government should work harder to follow what the UN Convention says.

Next, we will look at what state and territory governments have done for people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.
We want to thank everyone who:

- took part in Public hearing 5
- shared their story with us.

We hope more people will share their stories with us as the Royal Commission continues.
Word list

This list explains what the **bold** words in this report mean.

**Advisory Committee**

The Advisory Committee tells the Australian Government what people with disability need.

**Advocacy**

Advocacy is when someone speaks up for you.

**Advocacy organisations**

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- help you have your say
- give you information and advice.

**Advocate**

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COVID-19 is also called coronavirus.

COVID-19:

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Discrimination

Discrimination is when someone is treated badly because of something about them they can’t change.

First Nations people

First Nations people are also known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Formal

When something is formal, there are strict rules about how it should be done.
Funding
Funding is money from the government to pay for services.

Gap
A gap is an area where something is missing.

Hearing
A hearing is a formal, public meeting.

Human rights
Human rights are rules about how everybody should be treated:

- fairly
- equally.

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)
The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) runs the NDIS.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a way to support people with disability.
**NDIS participants**

NDIS participants are people with disability who:
- take part in the NDIS
- have NDIS plans
- have NDIS funding.

**Pandemic**

COVID-19 has been called a pandemic because it spread quickly to lots of countries around the world.

**Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

PPE includes things like:
- face masks
- face shields
- gloves.

**Policies**

Policies are:
- government plans for how to do things
- where rules come from.
Public health emergency

A public health emergency is a time when:

- there is a risk to the health of everyone in the community
- everyone needs to act quickly to protect themselves
- governments need to do what they can to keep people safe.

Recommend

When we recommend something, we say how to make things better.

Self-advocacy

People with disability can speak up for themselves.

This is called self-advocacy.

Statement of Concern

Our Statement of Concern is a document about things we worry about.

Summary

A summary only includes the most important ideas.
Contact us

You can email us at
DRCenquiries@royalcommission.gov.au

If you have a question, you can call us on
1800 517 199.

We are available on Monday to Friday
between 9am and 5pm.

We are not available on public holidays.

You can also call the National Relay Service
on 133 677.
You can write to us at:
GPO Box 1422
Brisbane
QLD 4001

You can follow us on:

Facebook
www.facebook.com/disability.royalcommission.gov.au

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